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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the use of cooperative teaching to teach all students in the general education classroom and the three most promising approaches to implementing cooperative teaching: team teaching, supportive learning activities, and complementary instruction. The first method, team teaching, is defined as having the initial presentation of new content shared between two teachers who jointly plan and present the targeted academic subject content to all students. The different types of team teaching are highlighted, including: standard team teaching, smaller groups, part A/part B content, presenter/helper, higher understanding, and follow-up. The paper describes supportive learning activities as having cooperative teaching partners identify, develop, and lead student activities designed to reinforce, enrich, and/or enhance learning. Described strategies include: distinct activities, small group work, diverse group work, debate format, four groups, leapfrog-jigsaw, and three groups/two teachers. Complementary instruction is defined as having one instructor maintain primary responsibility for teaching the specific content matter while the cooperative teaching partner takes responsibility for teaching students the functional skills necessary to acquire the material. Different methods of this technique are provided, including academic survival skills and interviewing. Specific suggestions are made for cooperative teaching arrangements during testing, such as modifications, instant feedback, and peer grading. (CR)

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Cooperative Teaching: Portraits of Possibilities

Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the Council for Exceptional Children

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Cooperative Teaching: Portraits of Possibilities

Historically, teaching has been a "lonely profession," with teachers working in near total isolation. How can schools establish a new professional culture capable of responding more effectively to the rapidly changing needs of the contemporary American school system? The most promising alternative is professional collaboration between teachers, especially in the form of cooperative teaching.

In cooperative teaching, two (or more) educators possessing distinct sets of skills work in a coordinated fashion to teach academically heterogeneous groups of students together in the general classroom (Bauwens & Hourcade, 1995). The critical feature is that two educators are simultaneously present in the general education classroom for a scheduled part of the instructional day. The essential philosophy undergirding this arrangement is that all educators are responsible for all students.

The three most promising approaches to implementing cooperative teaching are (a) team teaching, (b) supportive learning activities, and (c) complementary instruction (Bauwens & Hourcade, 1995). Within each of these approaches we have identified specific ways to restructure the physical and instructional environment so as to maximize the educational impact of two educators cooperatively teaching.

Team Teaching

In team teaching, the initial presentation of new content is shared between two teachers who jointly plan and present the targeted academic subject content to all students as clearly and concisely as possible (Bauwens & Hourcade, 1995). At various times each might assume primary responsibility for specific types of instruction or portions of the curriculum.

1. Standard team teaching: This is what is traditionally thought of as co-teaching. One teacher presents the basic material to the class while the other circulates among the students, supplementing the lesson with concrete objects and manipulatives to bring home the concept. This allows the use of multiple modalities - students see it and hear it.

2. Smaller groups: Two teachers take separate groups to opposite ends of the classroom. They should be heterogeneous groups. This technique reduces the student-teacher ratio. Both groups receive the same instruction. For this to work, both teachers must agree they both have the expertise to teach the lesson independently. The groups should be facing away from each other.

3. Part A/ part B content: Each teacher takes a heterogeneous group of students to present separate parts of a non-sequenced lesson. When the lesson is completed, the groups rotate teachers to receive the other part of the lesson. Again, a reduced student-teacher ratio is achieved.

4. Presenter/helper: One teacher is positioned at the front of the class, providing the basic lesson and doing the bulk of the teaching. The second floats around the classroom, monitoring the level of student understanding and helping where necessary by paraphrasing or clarifying portions of the lesson where students are having trouble grasping the content. The second teacher also assures students stay on task, and stops the other teacher to ask for clarification when she senses students need it.

5. Higher understanding: Both teachers present the lesson together. One teacher provides the basic information, while the other thinks about the instruction and how to move the class to a higher level of understanding. The second teacher then interject prompts to move the class to that level throughout.

6. Follow-up: When basic instruction is completed, teachers can split the class into two groups with different needs for follow-up. One teacher can conduct a basic review for the larger group while the other runs intensive instruction or enrichment activities for the smaller group.

Supportive Learning Activities

In supportive learning activities, cooperative teaching partners identify, develop, and lead student activities designed to reinforce, enrich, and/or enhance learning for all students. These activities can precede the primary instruction, follow it, or be integrated throughout it.

1. Distinct activities: Two groups of students learn distinct lessons from the two teachers. Individual students from each group are then paired with counterparts from the other group to teach each other lessons they learned from the teachers. This peer tutoring activity can be monitored simultaneously by both teachers.

2. Small group work: Two teachers can monitor cooperative learning activities. One teacher can take one small group with intensive instruction, or to discuss a project while the other circulates around the classroom, monitoring cooperative learning activities in progress.

3. Diverse group work: One teacher monitors student pairs doing cooperative learning or peer tutoring and other students do individual reading. The other teacher works with a small group of students who are not ready to move on to the independent work, and need more drill and practice.

4. Debate format: Each teacher takes half the students, possibly divided into smaller cooperative learning groups, to guide their learning, research and presentation of arguments supporting opposing positions of a debate. Then the teachers bring the class together to hold the "debate."

5. Four groups: The cooperative teachers can divide the class into four working groups. One teacher works two groups each.

6. Leapfrog-jigsaw: This peer tutoring format allows one teacher to monitor group progress while the other imparts a step-by-step four-part lesson. The teachers divide the class into groups of four. Each student in the group will learn one step of a four-step lesson and be responsible for teaching the rest of his group. One teacher calls each group's number one student to her desk, teaches them step one, and sends them back to their groups to teach their classmates. The other teacher monitors the group's activities, and makes sure the students who are teaching the lesson to their group are doing so correctly. The same procedure is followed for the other three steps.

7. Three groups - Two Teachers: The teachers divide the class into three groups. One group works in multiple modality learning stations, under the watchful eyes of one co-teacher. Another group works with computers, and the third is given extended instruction by the other teacher.

Complementary Instruction

In complementary instruction one instructor typically maintains primary responsibility for teaching the specific content matter. The cooperative teaching partner takes responsibility for teaching students the functional "how-to" skills necessary to acquire the material, including such learning and study skills as taking notes, identifying main ideas, and analysis and evaluation (Bauwens & Hourcade, 1995).

1. Academic survival skills: One teacher teaches the basic lesson using traditional academic instruction, while the other provides a separate group of students with "how to learn" information on study skills. For example, one teacher might tell his group of students about an upcoming research project, while the other talked with her group about the steps to producing a research project, such as research, idea generation, topic choice, and organization.

2. Interviewing: Two co-teachers can model the interview process, while students try to apply the skills in pairs for an interviewing project. Students learn skills in gathering information, talking to people, and associated interviewing skills.

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Test Day

Cooperative teaching arrangements can be particularly useful on days when individual evaluations of student skills are taking place. Here are several specific suggestions.

1. Modifications: The teachers divide the class into two groups. One teacher monitors students who need test modifications, while the other supervise students who do not. Alternatively, the special education teacher might proctor the test, while the regular education teacher implements the modification, such as reading certain question aloud. The teachers should make sure the groups change from test to test avoid stigmatizing students.

2. Instant feedback: Cooperative teacher can use the power of two to provide students with instant feedback on their test answers as they are completed. This helps students learn more easily from their mistakes. As students turn in their papers, the cooperative teachers split up the grading responsibilities and then call students up to discuss their answers and where they went right and wrong.

3. Peer grading: The teachers allow peers to grade each others' tests. One teacher can read off the scoring key to the class, while each student scores his or her partner's test. The second teacher circulates around the room, monitoring the peer grading.

Conclusions

As is often the case with innovation, in the infancy of cooperative teaching approximately 10 years ago early practitioners believed intuitively in the power of collaboration. However, they often struggled to identify the specific components and strategies most likely to maximize the strength of two education professionals working together.

A decade of extensive research and practice later, cooperative teaching clearly has demonstrated itself to be an impressively powerful instructional strategy for providing success for students with special needs in general education classrooms. This success is due in large part to an accurate analysis and determination of those fundamental and practical strategies most critical to successful cooperative teaching. Teachers will begin to unleash the powers inherent in cooperative teaching when using the suggestions as jumping-off points from which to generate more and more creative utilizations of the power of two educators simultaneously truly working together in a co-active and coordinated fashion.

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